

NETWORKS

FAQ

Q I have run out of wired ports on my router. Can I add some more?

A All you need to do is buy a network switch. You can buy a five-port Gigabit Ethernet switch for around £28 and an eight-port switch for around £40. To connect it to your wireless router, you'll need to buy a cross-over Ethernet cable, which will cost around £3. Plug the crossover cable into one port on your switch and the other end into your router (unplug an existing device for now) and you've got extra ports. All your remaining wired devices can now be plugged into the new switch.

Remember, unless you have a Gigabit Ethernet router your new switch will connect to the router at 100Mbit/s. It is best to plug all your Gigabit devices, particularly storage, into the new switch as you'll get faster transfer rates.

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D-LINK DPR-1260

★★★★

£128 inc VAT

A printer server is a useful way of sharing a printer on a network without having to leave a PC on all the time. D-Link's DPR-1260 lets you share up to four USB printers on a wired or wireless network, so it's a good choice for a small office or a home with multiple printers. It's also the first printer server we've seen to support scanning as well as printing.

Installation is simple. Once you've connected to the DPR-1260 via its wired port, you can connect to the web-based management and configure the wireless network settings. Unfortunately, there's no utility built in to scan for available networks, so you'll have to enter your wireless details manually. The print server supports WEP and WPA encryption, so it should work with most networks.

Configuring your printer is simple, too. Just plug it into one of the four USB2 ports. The print server detects the printer and displays its name on the configuration page. To add a shared printer, you just need to select the printer from the configuration page and a small application is downloaded and run on your PC. If you haven't installed the printer on your PC before, the application will prompt you for the location of the driver file.

This can lead to problems, though. First, not all manufacturers provide the drivers as a folder, instead providing a single executable file that has to be run. These files can require your printer to be connected to your PC. Second, even if you can install your printer by pointing the configuration application at the driver folder, you won't get all the extras that come with your printer and you may find you haven't got all the advanced options in the printer driver. For completeness, we'd recommend installing the printer by connecting



it directly to your PC and then performing D-Link's network install.

The bigger problem with the DPR-1260 is that it doesn't work with all printers. The compatibility guide on D-Link's website goes so far as to say that Lexmark and Dell printers are not recommended. We can see why, as we couldn't get our Lexmark X5470 multifunction to work at all. The drivers installed correctly and Lexmark's utility warned us that the printer was running low on ink, but we couldn't get any pages to print. The X5470's scanner wasn't detected, either. We connected a Mustek standalone scanner, but this also wasn't detected. D-Link has a narrow range of supported scanners, so it's best to check the website for compatibility.

Once you have a compatible scanner, you can only scan through the DPR-1260's web-based management. This lets you scan an image to a JPEG or PDF file. You don't get full access to the scanner's settings, though, and have to choose scan quality from an arbitrary list of qualities: Highest, High, Medium and Low. You'll need to experiment with these settings and compare the results to a direct-connected scan.

The scanning might not be perfect, but otherwise the DPR-1260 is a good way of sharing multiple printers on a network, provided none of them is a Lexmark or Dell model.

David Ludlow

SUMMARY

- ✓ Easy to configure
- ✓ Four ports
- ✗ Not for Lexmark or Dell printers

PRINT SERVER Ethernet port, 802.11g (54Mbit/s) wireless, four USB2 ports
PART CODE DPR-1260
SUPPLIER www.morecomputers.co.uk
DETAILS www.dlink.co.uk

Also consider...

DEVOLO DLAN 200 AVdesk Starter Kit

★★★★★

£133 inc VAT

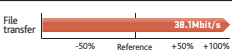


Devol's AVdesk Starter Kit comes with two HomePlug 200Mbit/s



network adaptors that transmit data over your existing power lines. These performed very quickly, with a throughput of 38.1Mbit/s coming close to pre-N wireless performance. If wireless is temperamental in your home, these network adaptors will provide you with a fast and reliable alternative.

POWERLINE NETWORKING
Two HomePlug AV Ethernet adaptors with Ethernet port
PART CODE 1186
SUPPLIER www.lambda-tek.com
DETAILS www.devlo.co.uk
✓ Good value ✗ Interfered with our wireless mouse
FULL REVIEW Feb 2007



PHILIPS Dual Phone VOIP 321

★★★★★

£58 inc VAT



Philips' Dual Phone VOIP 321 connects to your PC and your landline, so you can make calls via Skype or your existing line. It's easy to install, and the cordless handset lets you browse through your Skype contacts and see who's online. Call quality was amazing, and Skype calls sounded just as good as landline calls. It's excellent value if you use Skype a lot.



SKYPE PHONE Charging station, base station, USB and landline connection, 60-number address book (50 on phone and 10 on base station), 100 hours' standby time, 10 hours' talk time
PART CODE PHOPHIVOP3211S
SUPPLIER www.micro-direct.co.uk
DETAILS www.philips.com
✓ Easy to use; excellent call quality ✗ Monochrome screen
FULL REVIEW May 2007

NETGEAR SPH200D

★★★★★

£105 inc VAT



PHILIPS VOIP841

★★★★★

£129 inc VAT



Netgear's SPH200D and Philips' VOIP841 are cordless Skype phones that don't need a PC. Rather than use a wireless connection like SMC's WiFi Phone for Skype, both phones use DECT and connect to a base station that's plugged directly into your router. The base station also connects to your standard landline, so you can make calls using VoIP or your current service. As the phones will also ring when you receive a landline call, you don't necessarily need to subscribe to a SkypeIn account so people can phone you.

You can't carry the phones around as with the WiFi handsets, but they're great for use at home, particularly now Skype offers its Skype Pro service, which costs £9.20 for five months. This gives you free Skype Voicemail, £21 off Philips' VOIP841 and free UK landline calls, although you have to pay a 3.3p-per-call connection charge. We prefer the look of Philips' VOIP841. Its rounded edges and glossy black finish make it look a lot more stylish than the SPH200D's square white case. While the phones may look different on the outside, though, they're essentially the same on the inside. We suspect they're made by the same manufacturer, as you can connect either handset to either base station.

As there's no PC involved, setting up each phone is incredibly easy. Once the base station has been connected to your landline and router, via the wired 10/100 port, just turn it on. Both phones take two rechargeable batteries, charged via their docking stations. Once the handsets have batteries in them, they automatically connect to the base station. Philips' VOIP841 has the slightly newer firmware, as it asks you to choose your country from a list and then type in your area code. With Netgear's SPH200D, you have to manually enter your country code, such as ++44 for the UK, and type in your area code.

After that, both handsets are identical to use and give you the option to register a new Skype account or log in to an existing account. If you currently have SkypeOut credits, the handsets will show how many credits are remaining on the LCD screen. However, you cannot top up your credits from the handset; you will have to do this online through Skype's website.

The phones automatically retrieve your list of contacts from Skype. You can also add new contacts, and both handsets can store up to 500. For each contact, you can also store your dialling preference: Skype or Landline. As with the PC Skype application, the handsets display a contact's online status with an icon. The phones have identical low-resolution screens, but they're good enough to make out a contact's status easily. There's no answerphone built into either handset, so you must hook up your old one for your landline. Skype has a voicemail service that costs £3.45 for three months, although this works only with VoIP calls, not landline calls. Philips provides 12 months of Skype voicemail for free, as well as 120 minutes of SkypeOut.

Call quality is surprisingly different. Netgear's SPH200D sounds, at best, like a mobile phone. Calls sounded a little over-processed and fuzzy. Philips has clearly put its Dect experience into its SPH200D, and the quality is brilliant. Skype calls were so clear, they sounded almost as if they were being made over a landline.

While these handsets may be very similar, Philips' VOIP841 has the slight edge. It has better sound quality, comes with free Voicemail, and you can get £21 off its price if you sign up for Skype Pro. If you only use Skype with your PC on, though, you should opt instead for Philips' VOIP 321 (see 'Also consider...' below left).

David Ludlow

NETGEAR SUMMARY

- ✓ Good value
- ✓ Easy to set up
- ✗ Call quality can sound fuzzy

SKYPE PHONE BASE STATION, Ethernet and landline connection, docking station, 500-entry address book, 120 hours' standby time, 12 hours' talk time
PART CODE SPH200D-100UKS
SUPPLIER www.dabs.com
DETAILS www.netgear.com

PHILIPS SUMMARY

- ✓ Excellent call quality
- ✓ Free voicemail
- ✗ Costs more with no Skype Pro

SKYPE PHONE BASE STATION, Ethernet and landline connection, docking station, 500-entry address book, 120 hours' standby time, 12 hours' talk time
PART CODE VOIP841
SUPPLIER www.skype.com
DETAILS www.philips.com

CHOOSING A... VoIP Provider

SERVICE TYPE: PC

COST PER MONTH: Free

FREE CALLS: Other users only

STANDARD TELEPHONE CALLS: From around 1p per minute

1 You need to choose the kind of service that works best for you. An application with the minimum specifications as listed above requires a computer in order to work. This means you can install it on a notebook and carry it around with you, which is handy for travellers. You can get applications such as this from Skype, Microsoft, Tiscali and Tesco. If you're looking for a replacement home phone, you need to sign up for a fixed VoIP line instead, such as that provided by Vonage or BT.

2 With an application on your PC, you'll be able to see when your friends are online and make free phone calls to any user of the same service anywhere in the world. If you want to call traditional landlines, you'll need to buy credits, such as SkypeOut. Call costs vary between countries, so check the current pricing and pick the service that provides you with the best deal. Most developed countries should cost you around only 1p per minute.

If you want to receive phone calls, you'll need to buy a telephone number, such as with SkypeIn. This usually results in a monthly charge.

3 A fixed VoIP service works like a traditional phone. A basic service will cost around £8 per month, but you'll get a telephone number and free UK landline calls, too. You'll also get free VoIP calls to any user of the same service, although it's hard to tell who does use it as you're just dialling normal telephone numbers and they give no indication of which service is being employed. Pick the service that best fits your needs; if you make a lot of foreign calls, you should go with the service that offers the cheapest calls to the countries you call most often.

4 A fixed VoIP service should come with a telephone adaptor so you can use your existing telephone and answerphone with it. Look for an adaptor that will also connect to your existing telephone line, so your friends can still call you without having to learn a new number. Your old line is also useful as a backup and for making emergency calls.